

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005114

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2025

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#) [I2](#) [PKK](#)

SUBJECT: STATE OF PLAY ON TURKEY-PKK

REF: A. ANKARA 2973 (NODIS)

[1](#)B. ANKARA 4186

[1](#)C. ANKARA 5038

Classified By: CDA Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: The PKK issue remains at the top of the political agenda in Turkey. Ethnic tensions--along with the death toll--are on the rise, while crowds at funerals of soldiers killed in PKK attacks have added "Damn the USA" to their traditional chant, "Damn the PKK." The Turks appreciate increased U.S. intelligence and our offers of enhanced law enforcement cooperation against the PKK in Europe. But their central concern is the PKK's command and control center in northern Iraq, and they continue to make reference to potential unilateral action there. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Renewed PKK violence in Turkey is consuming the attention of the public, press, policy makers and military leaders, and threatens our still-recovering relationship with Turkey. From the Prime Minister and the CHOD, all through the military and the bureaucracy, and increasingly among the public, Turks ever more insistently are asking if the United States is serious about helping Turkey deal with the PKK terrorist threat emanating from northern Iraq. The press highlights the funerals of Turkish soldiers killed by the PKK, fueling the sense of outrage. Mourners now shout "Damn the USA" along with timeworn "Damn the PKK."

[1](#)3. (C) The violence has returned the "Kurdish problem" to the fore of Turkish domestic politics. Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Diyarbakir earlier this month, itself a product of the PKK's ramped-up violence, has sparked a debate about what non-military measures should be taken to address the poverty and feeling of disenfranchisement prevalent in the predominantly Kurdish southeast. During his August 25-26 visit to Ankara, EUR DAS Bryza emphasized measures against the PKK that Turkey and the U.S. could take together outside of Iraq; this approach was well received by Foreign Minister Gul, TGS/J3 MG Zorlu and the media. A long-time contact from Hakkari (Turkey's southeastern-most province and a PKK stronghold) told us Aug. 27 that Turkey's Kurds are fed up with both the PKK and the military; the people are much more interested in economic opportunity than the dream of an independent Kurdish state. Yet the PKK still manages to influence and/or intimidate the local population.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Recent ugly incidents in Turkey are increasingly evoking memories of the "bad old days" of the 1980s and 1990s. On Aug. 27, protesters who went to the local hospital in Batman (deep in the southeast) to collect the bodies of six PKK terrorists killed by Turkish security forces clashed violently with police, resulting in the death of a protester and many injuries on both sides. Mobs in Trabzon and Izmir reportedly attempted recently to lynch PKK suspects. The press further reported Aug. 31 that security forces arrested nine DEHAP (pro-Kurdish party) activists for calling a PKK terrorist killed in Turkey "a martyr." The Chief of the Turkish Land Forces, GEN Yasar Buyukanit, reflected in an Aug. 30 speech that the unrest threatened to turn Turkey into "another Palestine," referring to an intifada-type resistance. U.S. policy and inaction against the PKK in northern Iraq is played out in the context of this political tension.

[1](#)5. (S/NF) Privately, Turkish officials tell us they appreciate that we are providing intelligence support for the Turks' struggle against this terrorist organization in Turkey and that we are forming a plan to pursue diplomatic, intelligence, and law enforcement measures in Europe. But the Turks rightly point out that the PKK's command and control center is in Iraq, where it appears that the organization operates relatively unencumbered.

[1](#)6. (C) While it is hard to pinpoint exactly how many Turkish soldiers and civilians have been killed since the PKK revoked its unilateral cease-fire in June of last year, we have heard estimates that range as high as 150. The PKK has also expanded its attacks on civilians by bombing buses and passenger trains, or the tracks in order to make the trains derail. The PKK almost always attacks through the use of IEDs, rarely taking on the Turkish military, Jandarma or police in firefights.

[1](#)7. (SBU) The PKK has also moved into tourist areas, killing

five civilians (including two foreigners) in the July 16 bomb attack in the western resort town of Kusadasi, and seriously wounding a Dutch tourist in the July 23 bombing at an Istanbul restaurant.

18. (C) While the Turks still hold out hope that the U.S. (or the ITG) will take steps against the PKK in Iraq, the military has increasingly been looking at options for taking unilateral steps. The CHOD, GEN Hilmi Ozkok, previewed this thinking during Amb. Edelman's May 25 farewell call (ref a). Ozkok outlined the increase in violence in Turkey, and said that Turkey may once again have to resort to cross-border operations against PKK camps in northern Iraq. Then-D/CHOD GEN Ilker Basbug subsequently discussed cross-border operations and the concept of "hot pursuit" at length with then VCJCS Gen Pace on June 8 at the Pentagon. Basbug then gave a lengthy press conference in Ankara on July 19, in which he argued that under international law Turkey has the right to take unilateral action if a terrorist threat is emanating from Iraq. He drew a sharp distinction between hot pursuit (chasing PKK terrorists who attempt to escape from Turkey into Iraq) and cross-border operations, which would be larger actions to include attacking PKK camps in northern Iraq (see ref b).

19. (C) COMMENT: Despite our efforts to promote Turkey-Iraq dialogue on this issue through trilateral talks, and our initiative to increase cooperation with Turkey in dealing with PKK activities in Turkey and in Europe, we still face the potential that the Turks may feel compelled to take unilateral military steps in northern Iraq. They are now balancing this impulse--and the pressing need to do and say something publicly--against the significant negative ramifications this would provoke from the ITG, the EU, and us. However, should the situation continue to worsen, we cannot assume that Turkey would forego taking such action indefinitely.

MCELDOWNEY